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Cleaning up after Casey



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WASHINGTON—When Bill Casey resigned as director of central intelligence he was hailed for restoring morale at the CIA and doubling its budget. Paradoxically, he also crippled the agency and the President.

Proof is that, for all its new morale and new money, when the time came to run a high-risk covert operation—the secret arms dealings with Iran—the President couldn't use Bill Casey's CIA. Over the last six years, Casey had generated so much mistrust that Congress had tied the agency in knots with laws, restrictions and requirements for advance notification and consultation.

Instead of using CIA professionals to determine whether there really are any Iranian moderates and how one might woo them, Reagan had to rely on an odd assortment of retirees, part-time consultants, National Security Council freebooters, Israeli experts and Iranian confidence men.

Your tax dollar pays for a stronger CIA, and you find out in the papers that secret policy is actually carried out by a mysterious businessman named Albert Hakim and retired Air Force Gen. Richard Secord. The professionals on the government payroll can't be—or are too smart to be—used.

You can blame Congress for this, but Congress was only reacting to the age-old suspicions that Casey reignited about the CIA. He misled the Intelligence committees about the secret mining of Nicaragua, for example, and then signed a letter, subsequently ignored, promising that he would notify them in advance of any significant covert operations.

Casey's counsel, Stanley Sporkin, provided the dubious advice that Reagan didn't in fact have to notify Congress of anything, despite Casey's promises.

With Casey's blessing, the CIA found its role debased: It was not used as a source of astute intelligence on Iran; it did not provide the expert operatives for daring escapades. Instead it used its money and its morale to hold Ollie North's coat as he and his colleagues ran amok.

The CIA set up the secret Swiss bank accounts to receive money from the Iran arms sales. It has no idea where the money went. The CIA provided the planes to ship weapons to Iran. It was never, as far as we can tell, asked to assess whether arming Iran was a prudent policy.

When CIA professionals first suspected that funds from Iran were being diverted to the Contras, Casey dismissed their suspicions as fragmentary and never reported them to the Justice Department.

The main consequence of Casey's stewardship of the CIA will fall on the presidency—and not just Reagan but his successors. For 10 years, a group of congressmen—mostly conservatives—have sought to unleash Reagan from the restrictions of the 1970s: the War Powers Act, the Arms Export Control Act, the Clark Amendment outlawing covert operations in Angola, etc. Now their efforts have been subverted.

"It's a sad thing for those of us who have been trying to restore the power of the presidency to find that our hero has made a bad decision, tolerated bad decisions, and undermined what we were trying to achieve in restoring presidential power," says Rep. Richard Cheney (R-Wyo.), a leading House conservative.

"The fact that one President screwed up does not justify destroying the capacity of future Presidents to do what needs to be done in terms of covert action," Cheney added. Cheney is a firm believer in the Reagan Doctrine—Reagan's policy of aiding Third World nations to fight communism—and fears that it may fall victim to the revelations



Casey: Not all good for the CIA

about the CIA and Iran.

Certainly there is a need for covert action. Presidents need a secret agency when conventional diplomacy and conventional military force just won't work. That agency could be the CIA, but after Bill Casey, somebody is going to have rebuild its reputation, its confidence and its relationship with Congress.